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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
NATIONAL FOREIGN ASSESSMENT CENTER

12 February 1980

MEMORANDUM

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A POST-MORTEM OF THE NEAR-SUCCESSION IN YUGOSLAVIA

SUMMARY

Yugoslav President Tito's illness since the beginning of the year has given Belgrade time to prepare for the succession period. It appears the Yugoslavs have used the time well. Formally, Steven Doronjski and Lazar Kolisevski, both relative political non-entities, have been in charge of the collective party and state leaderships. The real power, however, evidently is in the hands of a small group of men Tito has long trusted. These leaders are Vladimir Bakaric, Milos Minic, Defense Minister Ljubicic, Interior Minister Herljevic, and Stane Dolanc. "First among equals" in the group is Bakaric, whom Tito placed "in charge." [redacted]

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The Formal Succession Mechanism

1. Yugoslav President Tito's illness in early January brought Yugoslavia to the verge of the succession, and power in effect passed into the hands of Tito's successors. Now, with Tito's health rapidly deteriorating, a look at what happened in January may give us clues as to how the system will function if he dies soon. While there are limitations on the judgments we can make, the January events do, nevertheless, provide us with a rare glimpse of how the Yugoslav leadership is likely to conduct itself without Tito. [redacted]

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2. With Tito seriously ill, the chairman of the Yugoslav Assembly commission for legal affairs, Miodrag [redacted]

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Zecevic, held a briefing devoted to the succession question for foreign journalists on 16 January. This move was probably unprecedented in Communist annals. Zecevic's briefing reflects Yugoslav confidence in their preparation for the succession. Just in case there were any doubts, Zecevic confirmed that Lazar Kolisevski, current Vice President of the state Presidency, would succeed Tito in the state hierarchy until Kolisevski's current term of office expires in May. At that time, he will be succeeded by the Bosnian representative on the state presidency, Cvijetin Mijatovic.

[redacted]

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3. Zecevic also verified that there is no provision for the replacement of Tito as President of the party. When Tito dies, Zecevic said, "the office will be subsumed within the party presidency as a whole." The leading member of that body, the current Presidium chairman, Stevan Doronjski, assumes the majority of Tito's roles and functions in the party leadership. Zecevic confirmed that the chairman would fill the ex officio seat on the collective state presidency reserved for the President of the party.

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4. On 12 January when Tito checked into the hospital in Ljubljana he met with Doronjski and Kolisevski--a gesture clearly designed to give an air of legitimacy and continuity to the two men who legally assume much of Tito's power. On the surface, then the succession machinery began to function, and function smoothly.

[redacted]

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The Locus of Real Power

5. Clearly, however, it is the behind-the-scenes political activity that could spell the difference between success or failure of the Yugoslav succession mechanism. With this in mind, Tito, prior to his first operation, called on his longtime friend and adviser Vladimir Bakaric to "take charge," and oversee the smooth operation of the collective leadership system. We believe Tito wanted (and wants) Bakaric to act as a stabilizing influence and to provide continuity as Yugoslavia moves from Tito's personal rule to the new collegial system. Bakaric, the last of Tito's World War II partisan colleagues, also may attempt to play the role of referee, keeping the country's diverse nationalists and factions in line and arbitrating disagreements that are bound to arise between the country's leaders. Prior to Tito's illness, it was not clear what role Bakaric would play in the succession. Now, it appears he will be a central, if not the central, figure in overseeing the transition of power.

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6. Bakaric, for example, addressed a national prime time television audience to mark the first anniversary of Edvard Kardelj's death. In doing this, Bakaric carefully documented his close association with Kardelj--the father of Yugoslavia's self-managing socialist system--and his firm support for the innovations in the system of Yugoslav

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socialism that Kardelj masterminded. Bakaric's impressive and vigorous delivery style was intended to provide a symbol of continuity with the past and a reassurance that Yugoslav policies will continue, with or without Tito.

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7. Several other Yugoslav leaders evidently also played leading roles during January. They included Milos Minic, a close Tito adviser and the Presidium's main foreign policy expert; Franjo Herljevic, Minister of Internal Affairs; Stane Dolanc, longtime Tito associate and Presidium member; and General Nikola Ljubacic, Minister of Defense.

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8. While Bakaric was assuring audiences at home and abroad that Yugoslavia would not deviate from its chosen path to socialism, Minic forcefully reasserted Yugoslavia's independent foreign policy. Speaking to a party gathering on 1 February, Minic--for the second time in two weeks--called for the withdrawal of "foreign forces" from Afghanistan as soon as possible. Earlier, on 11 January, a joint session of the party and state presidencies met and endorsed the government's opposition to the Soviet military intervention in Afghanistan.

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9. Throughout January, Yugoslav officials, while expressing concern for Tito's health, projected a business-as-usual image.

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10. The January events showed the Yugoslavs approaching the succession with a great deal of resolve and determination. The atmosphere in the major Yugoslav cities appeared to be one of calm, and there were only a few isolated reports of public concern. The populace expressed its uneasiness in a few cases by withdrawing hard currency from bank accounts, but these withdrawals were not extensive. The media reported on Tito's condition frequently and candidly as Yugoslav radio and television regularly featured medical bulletins. There was no attempt to conceal anything from the citizenry; when the first operation failed, the general public was notified within a matter of hours. [REDACTED]

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11. As if to assure the man-in-the-street of the leadership's determination to pursue Yugoslavia's nonaligned course--with or without Tito--the media repeatedly denounced the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan and called for the total withdrawal of Soviet forces. The domestic press also reminded its readers of Yugoslavia's accomplishments and the correctness of Tito's road to socialism. The party journal Komunist lauded Yugoslav policies and Belgrade's achievements in building socialism. In an appeal to the entire populous, the journal cited Yugoslav stability as not only a result of the party and its members but of all those who are participating in the building of modern Yugoslavia. Komunist also reiterated Yugoslavia's determination to strengthen the all-peoples' defense system and to fight any individual, group, or nation challenging that right. [REDACTED]

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Outlook

12. While Yugoslavs have worried for years how they will survive the passing of Tito's 35 year one-man rule, the lesson of January appears to be that the leadership is determined to carry out a smooth transition of power. Now, a successful--albeit short--precedent exists which should give the post-Tito leadership added confidence when the succession does actually occur. The mature and open manner in which the regime went about preparing for the succession is indicative of a large degree of confidence and efficiency in the government and party over their ability to govern without Tito at least in the near term. [REDACTED]

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13. Looking to the post-Tito era, it is also apparent that important decisions in Yugoslavia will initially be made collectively, by Tito's inner circle of close associates and trusted advisers. In addition to the key individuals already mentioned, several others could play a significant role in the future course of events: Berislav Badurina, Tito's chef

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de cabinet; Premier Djuranovic; party Presidium secretary Dragosavac; and Presidium member and economic expert Grlickov. [REDACTED]

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14. How well this group will be able to work together over a longer period of time must, at this point, remain an open question. In the immediate wake of Tito's passing an overriding sense of common purpose is likely to prevail, but this cohesion may dissipate with time. [REDACTED]

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